

J.S.M. Neill House
725 Madison Avenue
Helena
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-22

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

J. S. M. NEILL HOUSE

HABS No. MT-22

ADDRESS: 72S Madison Ave., Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana

OWNER: Mrs. George G. E. Neill

OCCUPANT: Mrs. George G. E. Neill

USE: Residence

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This imposing home was presented to his daughter, Ann, as a wedding gift by former Governor S. T. Hauser (see MT-23) in 1888. It was purchased from Ann K. and Olis R. Allen by John S. M. Neill in 1903 for \$10,000.

John S. M. Neill was the owner and publisher of the Helena Independent, a civic leader in Helena and active in state politics as a Democrat. This house has remained in the Neill family, and is one of the best preserved of the fabulous nineteenth century mansions in Helena.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

John S. M. Neill came to Helena in 1883. He was first engaged in the real estate business. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland appointed him Surveyor General of Montana. The next year, 1895, he purchased the Helena Independent, and became its publisher and editor.

The Helena Independent was a strongly Democratic newspaper that backed William A. Clark to the hilt in his efforts to become United States Senator from Montana. Neill was a member of a committee organized in 1898 to secure the election of Montana legislators who would name Clark as senator. They were unable to get the Clark ticket elected,

but when the legislature assembled in 1899, they were on hand with large sums of money to influence its members to vote for Clark. In the investigation following the resultant bribe scandal, Neill was named as one of those who was involved in vote-buying.

Neill was a civic leader in Helena, and active in the promotion of various projects that would benefit the city. He was a member of a committee that raised \$300,000 in 9 days to bring about a new hotel for Helena, and at the time of his death was preparing plans for a state fair to be held in Helena.

The Neill residence was built in 1888 by ex-Governor S. T. Hauser as a wedding gift for his daughter Ann K. Allen. The architects for the building were Paulsen and McConnell, Helena architects. John C. Paulsen within a few years would become state architect, responsible for construction of many of the buildings in the growing state (see also MT-25).

Ann K. Allen and Olis R. Allen sold the property to J. S. M. Neill in 1903.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

Henry, Olive, "They Built More Stately Mansions in Gay Nineties", Helena Independent Record (newspaper), Helena, Montana, June 3, 1962.

Helena Independent (newspaper), Helena, Montana, March 23, 1912.

Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1894.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 45' x 56', exclusive of porches.

Foundation - native granite.

Wall Construction - brick bearing wall construction; wood trim.

Porches - enclosed front porch on the west and north between projections of the structure of brick piers, wood trim and wood windows. Small open back porch on the southwest corner of building off of the dining room.

Openings - Entrance: single oak door, 3'-0" x 7'-0", with 1 small rectangular light.

Windows: D.H. 1/1 wood sash; wood casements; 1 small bay window; D.H. 2/2 units; rectangular stained glass window units; numerous fixed units.

Roof - gable roof with two turrets; approximately 45° pitch; wood shingles.

Chimney - brick.

INTERIOR

The basic plan is the same today as when the building was built. The kitchen has been modernized, electricity substituted for gas, but little else has changed. The fireplace in the grand hall has not been in working condition since the 1935 earthquake.

Floor Plan - The entry foyer is in the northwest corner of the building with the entry oriented westward. A pair of double oak panel doors with a single light opens from the foyer into the grand hall. The grand hall, or parlor (it occupies two-thirds of the ground floor) has a projecting bay to the north with a marble fireplace on the north wall. Externally the north wall of the small angular bay is the chimney of the fireplace and extends upward three stories as a dominant feature. In the northeast corner of the building, accessible through a door from the grand hall, is the card room, or bamboo room -- so called because of its bamboo wall finish. To the south of the card room is the open oak staircase to the upper floor, then a hall bathroom under the stairs, then the large kitchen in the southeast corner of the building.

hall is the pantry, then the large dining room that opens onto the grand hall. Opening due west off the grand hall is the parlor with its turret in the southwest corner and a marble fireplace in the southeast corner.

The second floor has the enormous master bedroom above the grand hall, with its own bath above the card room. The remainder of the floor has three additional bedrooms, a bath and a screened-in sleeping porch above a portion of the kitchen. One bedroom has a turret above the first floor porch. An enclosed staircase leads to the third floor attic.

Stairway - open stairway to second floor; oak balustrade with elaborately carved newel post.

Floors - parquet hardwood flooring in the grand hall; oak T & G; carpets.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - plaster; wallpaper; bamboo wall covering in the card room; oak wainscot in the grand hall and dining room; oak beamed ceiling in the grand hall.

Fireplaces - The grand hall fireplace is set in a large brick arch with built-in wooden benches on either side, and has marble trim with a glazed tile hearth. The fireplace in the parlor room is set in the angle formed by the turret and another wall. It also has marble trim with a glazed tile hearth. The second floor bedroom above the parlor has a fireplace above the one downstairs.

Doors - hardwood paneled doors.

Trim - oak, elaborately moulded. Cherry and maple trim used in the parlor room.

Hardware - brass.

Lighting - gas.

Heating - steam.

OTHERS

General Setting - The residence is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Madison Ave. and Stuart Street. The main entry is oriented westward on Madison Avenue.

Enclosures - none.

Outbuildings - The original carriage house has been sold and is a residence today. A garage was constructed in later years; it is not of historical importance.

In the large yard to the south of the house is a small garden pavilion, octagonal in shape and having a pointed roof and walls of earth.

Prepared by: John N. DeHaas, Jr.
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Reviewed by: Eleni Silverman, HABS
September 1983